

THE BUTCHER'S BILL--WHAT THE WAR HAS COST IN LIFE

Deaths of All Combatants Equal Population of Serbia in 1914, 4,500,000—German Official Lists Indicate 4,000,000 Casualties—One-Half a Permanent Loss.

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Many times in recent months I have been asked to give in this Sunday article an estimate of the total losses of the various nations at war. Such an estimate necessarily must be based on a very large number of different and even contradictory assertions made by the various press agencies of the nations at war. They will be the result of calculations, many of them too intricate to explain in detail. I am, therefore, going to present my estimate as representing the best guess that I can make from all the information I have been able to get hold of, to support such portions of the statements I make as I can support by evidence and let the rest stand, with the express understanding that it represents a personal conclusion.

German Casualty Lists

At the outset we have one interesting piece of evidence supplied by the compilation made by British officials of the German official lists, compilations confirmed by similar research made in neutral countries like Holland and Denmark, and never denied, so far as I know, by the German government. It represents the addition of the various casualty lists that have been posted by the German government since the war began.

The last list of which we know brought the total up to 3,550,000, of which some 800,000 stood for deaths, 450,000 for missing and captured and the balance for the wounded who remained in German lines. We can say without debate that the men killed, captured and missing are permanently lost to Germany. But in addition some fraction of the men who have been wounded will be unable to return to the firing line. I am told by a friend lately returned from Germany that in Berlin this figure is set down at 10 per cent of the gross number of wounded, that is, in the case of the present list, 225,000.

A 4,000,000 Loss

Roughly speaking, then, we may say that of the 3,550,000 Germans whose names appear on the casualty list 850,000, or 24 per cent, are dead; 450,000, or 12.7 per cent, are captured or missing; 225,000, or 6.3 per cent, are permanently disabled. And the sum of these percentages is exactly 50 per cent of the total casualty list, when there is added the 7 per cent which represents the wounded who at any given moment will not be fit for duty because they have not yet recovered from their wounds. This last element is technically described as the permanent temporary loss.

Now it is generally agreed among all neutral observers that the German lists are somewhat behind the fact. This is proven by those who have taken the trouble to examine these lists. They discover that the lists of September, for example, will still be carrying the names of men who were killed, wounded or captured way back in the opening days on the Verdun operation. We get some notion of the actual situation from statements of the total of French casualties, which are certainly not in excess, proportionately, of the German, regard being had for the periods of quiet in the West, during which the Germans have been carrying on major operations on other fronts. If France with a population of 40,000,000 has made a loss of 2,500,000, Germany with a population of above 65,000,000 can hardly have escaped with a total casualty list of less than 4,000,000, a figure somewhat but not very greatly in excess of the official German statement of 3,550,000. Even this figure concedes a somewhat greater proportionate loss for the French, which is a matter open for conjecture and debate and sure to be challenged by French and British commentators.

The Total as Large as Serbia
But accepting the figure we have set forth, namely 4,000,000 for the Germans and similarly the 2,500,000 for the French, we are able to make some sort of statement for all the combatants. These estimates I am now going to put forth in tabular form and then discuss.

Casualty Lists of the six Great Powers:	
France	2,500,000
Russia	5,750,000
Great Britain	1,400,000
Italy	350,000
Total	10,000,000
Central Powers:	
Germany	4,000,000
Austria	4,000,000
Total	8,000,000

My estimate for the gross casualties of the six Great Powers at war is therefore 18,000,000, and I believe that the loss of the Allies is probably not less than 2,000,000 in excess of that of the Central Powers. To this total must be added the losses of the smaller nations at war, Rumania, Belgium and Serbia on the Allied side, Turkey and Bulgaria on the side of the Central Powers. The Portuguese losses in the African campaign have been too insignificant to mention. All told, these losses probably exceed 500,000 and are well below the million mark. Thus the total butcher's bill must amount to something over 18,500,000. We may say roughly that the killed, wounded and captured, together with the permanently disabled, probably amount to something over half the number of inhabitants of Italy in 1914.

Going back to the case of Germany, we saw that the official German figures indicated that just less than a quarter, 24 per cent of the German casualties, were deaths. Therefore we may say that of the 18,500,000 casualties suffered by the nations at war at least one quarter, or 4,500,000, represent deaths, and this is equal to the total population of the country of Serbia in 1914. In a word, the war that broke out over Serbia has already killed a number of men equal to the whole population of the little Balkan state.

Russia and Austria

Turning back to the table in the first column, it remains to explain the various numbers. The French and German have been discussed. As to the Russian, I have accepted the German figure, practically; that is, the Germans have recently announced the total Russian loss to be 6,000,000. This is probably excessive, as is the figure of 5,750,000, which I have adopted, but there is lacking any other satisfactory estimate of any sort.

As to Austria, we know that she has lost not less than 1,500,000 in prisoners alone, while her battlefield losses have been greater than those of France, because, with a population more than 10,000,000 in excess of that of France, she has been able to put larger numbers in the field and her necessities have compelled her to do this. Many months ago Austrian casualties were estimated at 4,000,000. I think this figure is now too small, just as I consider the Russian to be large, but again it must stand as the best conservative calculation available. As to the British and Italian estimates, they need no discussion and will probably stand with little question.

The Ratio of Casualties

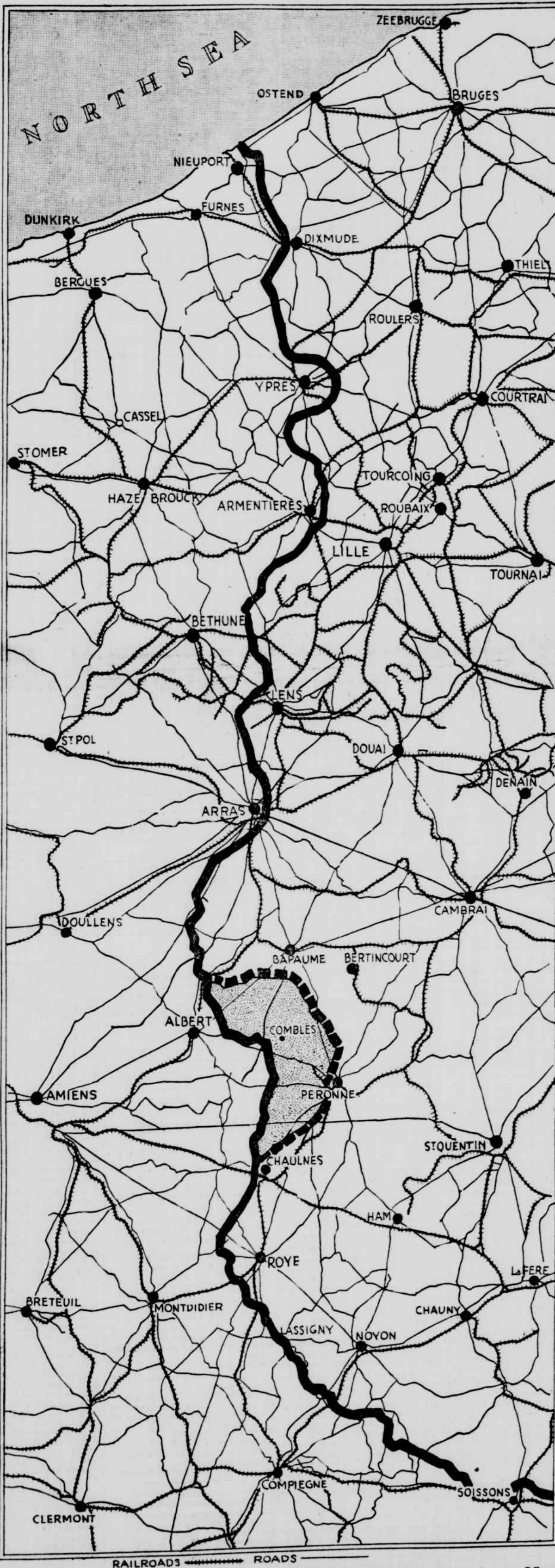
Having thus set forth an estimate of casualties, it remains to point out something of their meaning. At the moment when the war broke out the four great powers united against Germany and Austria had a European population of around 300,000,000. The combined population of Austria and Germany was 120,000,000. Now, there is no question more keenly debated than that of the proportion of a total national population which can be reckoned as capable of bearing arms. It may be 10 per cent, it may be 12, but it will be the same for all nations, approximately. We may say, then, that at the outset of the war the Allies had available a man power of 30,000,000, the Central Powers, a man power of 12,000,000. If the Allies have now suffered casualties amounting to 10,000,000, one-third of their whole force has been temporarily or permanently incapacitated. But if the Central Powers have suffered casualties amounting to 8,000,000, two-thirds of their man power has been temporarily or permanently incapacitated.

Now, in the case of the German official figures we saw that the total of permanent casualties, with relation to total casualties, was 50 per cent. Accepting this ratio we may say that the permanent loss of the Allies has been 5,000,000 and of the Central Powers 4,000,000. In other words, the Allies have permanently lost one-sixth of their man power, the Central Powers one-third. And this ratio will remain constant, whether the various nations are able to put 10 per cent or 12 per cent of their population into the field.

The Law of Attrition

Here is the foundation of all that has been said about attrition since the war began. In a war of exhaustion the weaker force must ultimately lose if the war continues steadily a trial of endurance. In the end, if the Germans continue to lose

THE WEST FRONT FROM THE SEA TO THE AISNE.



Central Powers Have Lost One-Third of Their Man Power, While Allies Have Lost One-Sixth—Sooner or Later They Must Face Shortage of Men—Civil War Parallel.

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at the rate of a third of their man power in the time in which the Allies are losing one-sixth, the Germans and their allies must succumb. And in the first twenty-six months of the world war this has been approximately the ratio of losses in the two camps.

A Shortage Already?

Now, British critics, notably Mr. Hilaire Belloc, who follows the French as well as the British official opinion fairly closely, but relies mainly on the French, assert that the German and Austrian losses have already been much higher, while German and Austrian critics will place the French losses as well as the British materially higher than I have. It will be recalled that I accepted the German estimate of Russian losses with but an insignificant modification. Perhaps the facts lie with the larger estimates made on both sides.

But what I want now to emphasize is that Mr. Belloc and his followers believe the German and Austrian losses have been so much larger than we have estimated that they assert that the Central Powers are already facing a shortage of men. What they mean is this: As it stands it requires not much less than 5,000,000 men to hold the lines of the Central Powers, eliminating the Bulgars and Turks. If the permanent loss of the Central Powers has been only 4,000,000, my figures, they still have 8,000,000 left, and 3,000,000 over the number needed to hold their present lines.

The Allies' Reserves

But if their permanent loss has been 7,000,000, then they have left no balance over the necessary 5,000,000. If it has been 6,000,000 their balance is only a million, which is not more than six months' supply. When you read reports of French and British critics of the Belloc school declaring that Germany is facing an absolute decline in man power, you will see that this grows out of an estimate of the total casualty lists of the Central Powers as something more than 50 per cent above my own estimate.

Now, it would be possible to fix the time in which, granted the Central Powers did not in the meantime win the war, they would have to shorten their lines, if we had the exact figures of their losses. They would have to shorten their lines because they would lack men to hold the present extent. In this time no such shortage could be felt by the Allies, because they started with a man power two and a half times as great—that is, a total man power of 30,000,000 against 12,000,000—and have never had in the field at any time more than 8,000,000. If they have lost 5,000,000 permanently and have 8,000,000 in the field, they now have a further supply of 17,000,000, as against 3,000,000 for the Central Powers, if our computation is approximately correct.

We do know that the population of the Allied nations is two and a half times that of the Central Powers. We do know that their losses have been, if actually greater than the German and Austrian, relatively much smaller, regard being had for their total man power, and this means that they are certain to have reserves to call upon when the reserves of the Central Powers have been exhausted.

German Exhaustion Must Come

Take a simple illustration. Eight men are fighting five. Behind the eight are twenty-two, ready to take their places; behind the five are only seven. If the first five men disposed of the first eight, while exhausting themselves, eight more will take the place of the first five, more the place of the first five. But then the second eight will have fourteen behind them, the second five only two.

Now, if the Central Powers have lost only 4,000,000 out of 12,000,000—that is, permanently lost them—in the first twenty-six months of the war, they may be able to go on for something less than two years more, losing at the same rate, before they will be unable to put 5,000,000 in the field. They will go longer if their losses are not as great, but they will go a shorter time if, as seems to be the case now, their losses increase with greater pressure on all sides.

Those who, like myself, believe that the German and Austrian losses are smaller than Mr. Belloc and his school assert, believe that the war will last for two years more, because they believe that it will take most of this time to exhaust the man power of the Central Powers. But even at the moment when the Central Powers feel the pinch they can temporarily save their situation by shortening their lines, going back for example, in the West, to a line from the Dutch frontier, through Liège and Luxembourg to Metz.

Only one thing is certain; we can't say when exhaustion will come, because we can

only guess at the figures of casualties. But we can say that it will come, that it will come to the weaker party, which is the Central Alliance, first, and that it will come while the opposing alliance has still abundant supply of men to keep its armies at the maximum of necessary strength. Conceivably the Germans may win the war, possibly the Allies may win the war; but if it goes on as it is now going, if it turns on battle losses, if it remains a contest of attrition, the ultimate outcome is patent.

Now, in such space as remains to me I desire to set forth a few more figures, an estimate of the cost in casualties of the campaign of the present year—that is, from January to the end of October. In this time I believe the French have lost 400,000, 250,000 at Verdun and 150,000 at the Somme and elsewhere; the British 400,000, mainly at the Somme; the Italians 200,000; and the Russians 1,000,000. This last is the German estimate of Russian casualties since June. It is high, but I accept it, only stretching it to include the operations prior to June, which were not very expensive. All told, the Allies have thus lost 2,000,000.

Failure at Verdun

Now as to the Central Powers: The German loss at Verdun was not less than 500,000. At the Somme it has been around 250,000, including all other casualties on the Western front. Defending themselves at the Somme, the Germans have lost about half as many men as their assailants. At Verdun, where they were the assailants, they lost at a similar ratio. On the eastern and Balkan fronts the German loss has been not less than 250,000, the price of checking the Russian drive. All told, the German loss has been 1,000,000. As for the Austrians, they have lost at least 750,000, including over 350,000 prisoners, mainly to the Russians.

Now examine these last figures and you will see what the results of the new Allied tactics of pounding have been, combined with the German failure at Verdun. In about ten months the Germans and Austrians, who started with a man power, let us say, of 12,000,000, or 10 per cent of their total population, have lost 1,750,000 in killed, wounded and captured, and this is more than 14 per cent of their total. In the same time the Allies have lost 2,000,000, or rather less than 7 per cent of their original man power, again applying the 10 per cent rule. In other words, the rate of exhaustion of the Central Powers this year has been twice as great in relation to their total resources as that of the Allies. It is my judgment, too, that the figures I have given are low for the Central Powers and high for their enemies.

The Allies' Gain

Nor does this complete the statement. We have official Russian figures to prove that 420,000 prisoners were taken by the Russians in their great advance, and these figures were repeated in debates in the Hungarian Chamber. We have the Italian claim of 30,000 prisoners taken in their Gorizia drive, and Anglo-French claims, officially made, of the capture of at least 75,000 Germans at the Somme. Here is a loss in prisoners of not less than 525,000 for the Central Powers.

As against this the Germans have claimed about 50,000 French taken about Verdun, the Austrians have claimed about the same number of Italian prisoners taken chiefly in the Trentino drive. German and Austrian reports have not claimed more than 100,000 Russian prisoners this year. Thus the loss in prisoners of the Allies is more than two and a half times less than that of the Central Powers and their permanent loss, by reason of the year's campaign, is thus less than that of their enemies. Able, because of their superior population, to bear much larger absolute losses than their enemies, the Allies have actually suffered losses absolutely, not merely relatively, smaller.

Attrition in the Civil War

In our own Civil War Grant was the first Union commander to grasp the logic of attrition. He applied it unhesitatingly. He accepted the responsibility for colossal losses that did not bring any advantage upon the battlefield for many months, because he foresaw that the time would come when the South, although its losses were actually smaller than his own, would not be able to replace the casualties out of its inferior population. Allied logic, strategy, policy, are Grant's; they are doing what he did; they are fighting his kind of a battle with equally great resources in numbers, if not in material, and with the control of the sea and superior financial powers, which the North possessed. For Americans the Civil War parallel was never more illuminating than at the present moment.

The Shaded Portion Inside the Dotted Lines Shows the Anglo-French Advance in the Somme Offensive.